There's a Slow Fire Burning in Cherry Creek State Park….

and even though it produces no smoke or flame, it is damaging hundreds of acres of park habitat each year. ***Noxious weeds,*** non-native plants such as:

- Saltcedar - Tamarisk (*Tamaricaceae*)
- Leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*)
- Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) ,

are appearing in enormous numbers throughout Cherry Creek State Park, displacing native plants essential to animal habitat and a healthy environment.

Saltcedar - Tamarisk (*Tamaricaceae*)

"Aren't those just pretty wildflowers?"

Although many noxious weeds, such as Purple Loosestrife or Canadian Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), can present an attractive appearance, the effect they have on the environment is devastating. These non-native and introduced plant species usually arrived in North America as contaminants to crop seeds. Taken from their native environment, they arrived in a land devoid of the animals, insects, and diseases that keep their numbers in check in their homeland.

As a result, they multiply astronomically here in Colorado. Native plants, which are still subject to animal and disease predation, cannot compete with these newcomers. They are squeezed out by noxious weed infestations, and as they disappear, so too do the animals that rely on them for food and shelter.

So while a field of spurge or thistle may look pretty, it's actually a scene of environmental devastation.

Leafy Spurge (*Euphorbia esula)*

"So why should I care"

Noxious weeds impact our enjoyment of the land. Cherry Creek State Park is blessed with a wide diversity of plant communities. The large variety of plant life found in the different ecosystems in our park are key reasons why we choose to visit and recreate here. Noxious weeds impact our recreational activities negatively. Weed overgrowth can cause hiking trails to close, and also cause the native vegetation that we expect to find, become sparse and out-numbered.

With a lower diversity of native plants due to the rampant weeds, the diversity of wildlife that can be found in the park also decreases. These animals have less of their natural food available and cannot feed off many of the noxious weeds.

When less wildlife can be found in the park most would agree that this is a negative change. The park also is aesthetically effected, when we look across a open space, that not to long ago was filled only with native plants co-existing in their natural ecosystem and is now overrun with noxious weeds.

"Why not just spray the things?"

Although spraying weeds with herbicide can be an effective means of control, it is not an answer in itself to Colorado's noxious weed problem. Particularly here in Cherry Creek State Park, environmental concerns, such as sensitive wetlands, and the sensitivities of the humans that recreate here, prevent the wholesale spraying of noxious weeds. Also, spraying is expensive, and only temporary; the cost alone makes spraying an unworkable solution. ***Integrated Pest Management,*** or IPM, is a solution that is being used increasingly on Colorado's public and private lands to attack the noxious weeds.

IPM uses a multi-phased attack, involving mechanical (pulling, mowing), biological (insects, plant diseases, grazing), chemical (spraying), and cultural (plant health) methods to control noxious weeds. By using two or more methods together, resource managers have greater success in reducing noxious weed populations to a sustainable level.

"What do you mean, 'sustainable level'? Why not just get rid of the weeds once and for all?"

Part of what makes these weeds "noxious" is their tenacity. We will never be able to completely eradicate noxious weeds in Colorado, let alone North America, simply because they are such tough competitors. As long as a single plant remains in the park, the possibility of re-infestation exists.

But if we can reduce the number of weed plants to a level where they are no longer negatively impacting the natural habitat of the park, then we will achieve a balance that we all - people, plants, and animals - can live with.

Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*)

"I had no idea this was such a big problem. Is there anything I can do to help?"

For now, the best thing we can all do as citizens of Colorado is to educate ourselves about the noxious weed problem facing our state. Each year, as weeds spread, thousands of acres of farmland and animal habitat become unproductive wastelands. Animals are displaced or disappear, and native plant species are seriously threatened.

Learn to identify noxious weeds and how to manage them in your own yard. Inform your neighbors of infestations you see on private land, and contact officials about infestations on public lands. Together, we can put out the slow fire of weed infestation.

Colorado Cares

A little bit of time makes a big difference!

For more Information, please contact the following:

- **Cherry Creek State Park**
  (303) 699-3860
  or check the web at www.parks.state.co.us
- **Colorado State Dept. of Agriculture**
  (303) 239-4182
  or check the Web at www.ag.state.co.us
- **Colorado State University Cooperative Extension, Arapahoe County Office**
  (303) 730-1920
  or check the Web at www.ext.colostate.edu
- **Russell Johnson, Arapahoe County Weed Control Specialist**
  (720) 874-6713

Noxious Weeds in Cherry Creek State Park

What Are They? Why Should We Care!